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UNCLAS WINDHOEK 000095

STATE FOR AF/S
STATE PASS TO AID FOR AFR/SA AND DCHA/OFDA
OFDA FOR PMORRIS, CCHAN, ACONVERY, LPOWERS, TDENYSENKO, HSHEPPARD
PRETORIA FOR HHALE, TROGERS

AIDAC

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SUBJECT: Disaster declaration: Namibia-severe flooding in northern and north eastern regions

Ref: A) Windhoek 70

B) Regional office of foreign disaster assistance trip notes, March 10 - 13, 2009

Summary and action request

¶1. This is an action cable. See paras 2 and 8.

¶2. On March 17, 2009, the President of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) declared a disaster and issued a request for international assistance for the flood-affected northern and northeastern regions of the country: Omusati, Oshana, Oshikoto, Kavango and Caprivi. Based on the GRN's disaster declaration and the continuing deterioration of conditions in the northern and northeastern regions, the Ambassador declares a humanitarian emergency of significant magnitude to warrant USG assistance and requests USD 50,000 under the Chief of Mission's (COM) authority to respond to the most urgent requirements. USAID/Namibia will provide a grant to the Namibian Red Cross Society (NRCS), an NGO with significant relief and rehabilitation experience that is working with the GRN in the flood affected areas. USAID/Namibia will collaborate with the USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) and the Food for Peace Office (USAID/FFP) to monitor the situation. COM may request additional assistance beyond emergency assistance based on GRN-identified needs. End summary and action request.

Events leading to emergency

¶3. Since January 2009, Namibia has experienced heavy rainfall, particularly in the northern and northeastern regions of the country. Flood waters from southern Angola have aggravated the situation. During January and February persistent rains, compounded by heavy rainfall in the neighboring countries of Angola and Zambia, resulted in flooding in the Omusati, Oshana, Oshikoto, Kavango and Caprivi regions. The affected areas are 700-900 kilometers north and northeast of Windhoek. According to the latest GRN assessment report, 92 people were killed during the floods. Approximately 300,000 people have been affected. Difficulty in accessing many parts of the affected regions makes these figures tentative. Many people have been or are being evacuated to higher ground and temporary housing. According to the report, nearly 12,000 persons have sought shelter in relocation camps in the affected regions.

¶4. The floods forced the closure of 218 schools affecting 100,000 students, and 45 clinics in the northern regions are inaccessible. While the floods are posing health hazards and there is fear of water-borne disease (e.g. cholera) outbreaks and increased incidence of malaria, the assessment reported no increase in either. The report does note the disruption of such health services as

immunization, antiretroviral therapy and treatment of illnesses and expresses concern about sewage systems in some communities overflowing, thus exposing surrounding populations to health risks. The assessment report also expresses concern regarding the lack of adequate clean water and sanitation facilities in most relocation camps. Extensive damage to infrastructure, including roads, bridges, schools, clinics and housing has been reported. Eighty-five percent of gravel roads in the flood affected areas have been damaged. Economic infrastructure and activities have been affected negatively, forcing small businesses to close, resulting in loss of trade opportunities and unemployment. For the second year in a row it is likely that much of the mahangu (sorghum) crops and significant food reserves in the affected regions have been destroyed and the inhabitants are likely facing dire food shortages. Further assessments of crop losses and food security are expected in the near future.

15. The GRN has demonstrated its willingness and capacity to respond to affected citizens' needs. A flood emergency management coordinating office was established in Oshakati to coordinate relief efforts. The Directorate of Emergency and Disaster Management in the Prime Minister's office conducted flood damage assessments in the northern and northeastern regions to gauge the extent of damage to infrastructure and threat to human lives. The directorate monitored the situation and assisted people affected by the floods by providing food and emergency housing. Populations in the low-lying communities affected by the flooding were evacuated to higher ground and resettlement centers. The Namibian Red Cross is active in the flooded areas and is providing assistance in the resettlement camps registering people, arranging medical services and providing non-food items. The President of Namibia appealed to development partners and the private sector to supplement limited government resources and asked for motorized boats, medicine, water purification tools, mosquito nets and food.

USAID/Namibia monitoring

16. USAID has maintained regular contact with the Southern Africa Regional Office/USAID/DCHA/OFDA. Regional Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and USAID officers visited the northern regions during March 10 - 13 and provided a report and recommendations to the Embassy, USAID and OFDA. USAID constantly monitors press reports and has been in regular contact with the Namibia Red Cross Society and the disaster emergency management directorate in the Prime Minister's office.

Humanitarian needs

17. The USG will respond through a grant to the Namibian Red Cross Society (NRCS) to meet selected specific needs identified by the GRN and NRCS officers in the field. USG assistance will be coordinated with the GRN Directorate of Emergency and Disaster Management to ensure it meets priority needs.

18. Based on reports from the GRN, the Namibia Red Cross Society and the press, we anticipate that the most critical humanitarian needs identified by the GRN will be for shelter, food, medicine, water and sanitation and water transport. It is anticipated that development partners may receive GRN requests for assistance beyond emergency needs, in particular rehabilitation needs, to address the damage and shortages caused by two successive years of heavy flooding. USAID/Namibia will collaborate with USAID/OFDA and USAID/FFP to determine and plan for a USG assistance package if additional USG assistance is required based on identified humanitarian and infrastructure rehabilitation needs.

Declaration of humanitarian emergency

19. Based on the current situation and ongoing needs resulting from the severe flooding in the north and northeastern regions of Namibia, and the GRN's disaster declaration and international appeal for help, I declare that a humanitarian emergency of such magnitude

that it is beyond the ability of the GRN to adequately respond has occurred and that it is in the interest of the USG to provide assistance to flood-affected populations. I hereby request USD 50,000 under the Chief of Mission's (COM) authority to respond to the most urgent requirements.

MATHIEU